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Sent: Wed 6/6/2012 2:06:04 PM
Subject: Fw: Wyo. official pins Pavillion pollution complaints on greed

FYI

- dgj -

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----- Forwarded by David Jewett/ADA/USEPA/US on 06/06/2012 09:02 AM -----

From: Elizabeth Blackburn/DC/USEPA/US
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Date: 06/06/2012 09:01 AM
Subject: Wyo. official pins Pavillion pollution complaints on greed

Wyo. official pins Pavillion pollution complaints on greed

Mike Soraghan, E&E reporter

Published: Wednesday, June 6, 2012

VANCOUVER, British Columbia -- Wyoming's top oil and gas official yesterday said the people in Pavillion, Wyo., who have complained that drilling polluted their water are motivated by money.

"I really believe greed is driving a lot of this," state Oil and Gas Supervisor Tom Doll told a meeting of fellow state regulators here. "I think they're just looking to be compensated."

Doll spoke to a full room at the midyear meeting of the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission, delivering a pointed and detailed critique of a December report from U.S. EPA confirming allegations that some groundwater in the area had been contaminated by fluid used in hydraulic fracturing of gas wells.

Doll said he and other state officials have concluded that the contamination EPA found in a monitoring well actually came from the drilling of the well itself.

"We believe the report is incomplete and bad science," he said.

Deb Thomas, an organizer who has worked with the Pavillion-area residents with water complaints, rejected the idea that the residents are motivated by money. She said Doll shouldn't be insulting residents

of his state.

"Although I've heard Encana reps say the impacted residents are driven by greed, this is the first time I've heard a state official publicly make that charge," Thomas said. "I'm surprised and saddened to hear Wyoming officials making judgments about Wyoming citizens. It is improper, and he should be sticking to facts rather than his opinions."

And EPA officials aren't backing down.

"EPA stands behind our draft report and the methods used to collect and assess data from Pavillion monitoring wells," EPA spokesman Richard Mylott said in an emailed statement. "We have been consistent in our commitment to conducting a transparent, public and independent peer review of our data and preliminary findings."

He noted that EPA has been working with state officials, the U.S. Geological Survey and others to do another round of sampling. But some of that work is what Doll criticized yesterday.

Doll said that state officials responded to the residents' complaints in 2008 and earlier by doing testing that found no contamination from oil and gas activity.

"So they went to EPA and said, 'We didn't hear what we wanted to hear,'" Doll said.

After EPA found "petroleum compounds" in 17 of 19 drinking water wells in 2010, the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry recommended that some well owners use alternate sources of water for drinking and cooking. The agencies made no conclusion about where those compounds came from.

Then EPA issued its report in December, based on sampling water in numerous wells. Its most controversial findings came from "deep" monitoring wells drilled much deeper than residents' drinking water wells.

It found that fracturing fluid contaminated the water near the deep monitoring wells, but not in the more shallow drinking-water wells (Greenwire, Jan. 23).

Doll said he believes that EPA decided fracking was the culprit and worked backward to support its conclusion.

EPA's finding punctured an industry talking point -- that fracturing has been used safely for 60 years and has never, ever contaminated groundwater. But fracturing done in Pavillion was much closer to the surface -- and groundwater -- than the mile-deep "fracking" in shale formations like Pennsylvania's Marcellus.

The agency did, however, find that oil and gas production activities -- drilling, not "fracking" -- did contaminate wells as shallow as 15 feet with high concentrations of benzene, xylenes and other toxins. But those concentrations still have not been found in drinking water.

EPA's report is a draft, and its findings will be subjected to peer review. Encana, the main operator in the area, has disputed most of EPA's findings and disparaged the agency's methods.

And so does Doll, who said he thinks there might be no way to satisfy the residents. He noted that the state has set aside \$750,000 to provide drinking water from cisterns for the residents (EnergyWire, June 1).

State officials have set aside the idea of a water pipeline because it would likely cost upward of \$2 million.

"They're not happy with the state," Doll said. "They're not happy with the governor of Wyoming. And they're not happy with the EPA at times."

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